

When the Master Washed the Disciples' Feet

What Was His Innermost Thought?

A condensed article from the pen of "C. H. M."

(EDITOR'S NOTE.—Recently while in Sunnyside, Washington, our good Brother Willis Belcher called our attention to a volume containing the writings of "C. H. M." (C. H. Macintosh). "C. H. M." is regarded by those of God's saints who are acquainted with the deeper things of His Word as a writer scarcely without a peer in modern times, when it comes to things deeply spiritual. The article to which our attention was called is entitled, "The Ministry of Christ." In this article "C. H. M." dealt with the meaning of the act of Christ when He washed the feet of His disciples. (See John 13:1-17). The deep spiritual content of this message—its absolute faithfulness to the meaning of Christ's act as we believe God has given us to see it—constrains us to take the space in this issue of our Foreign Missionary magazine to publish it in condensed form, preserving, however, the heart of the message. The interpretation of this passage by "C. H. M." corresponds to the interpretation given us by such men as A. C. Gaebele, C. I. Scofield and others. One is constrained to marvel that when men like these understand so clearly the spiritual meaning of the act of Christ, that they failed to see also that He intended this great spiritual meaning to be symbolized by rite the same as Christian baptism. If the spiritual washing in baptism was to be observed in outward form, why not the spiritual washing in feet washing? Anyhow, it is refreshing to know that these deeply spiritual writers have not permitted themselves to be led away from the truth by seeing in the act of our Lord, as so many have done, the simple performance of an old-time custom or an act inculcating humility or setting forth social service. This subject is discussed at length in the editor's booklet entitled, "The Faith Once For All Delivered Unto The Saints." —L. S. B.)

Having thus glanced at our Lord's service toward us in the past, let us look for a few moments at His present service—at what He is now doing for us continually in the presence of God. This we have most blessedly presented to us in that part of John 13, which I have read for you. If we look back at the past, we behold the perfect Servant nailed to the cross for us; if we look up to the throne now, we behold Him girded for us, not only according to our present need, but according to the perfect love of His heart—His love to the Father, His love to the church, His love to each individual believer from the beginning to the end of time.

"Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end. And during supper (see Greek), the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him; Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God: He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments; and took a towel and girded Himself. After that He poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded."

Here, then, we have a most marvelous presentation of Christ's present service toward "His own which are in the world." There is something peculiarly precious in the expression, "His own." It brings us so very near to the heart of Christ. It is so sweet to think that He can look at such poor, feeble, failing creatures as we are, and say, "They are Mine. It matters not what others may think about them; they belong to Me, and I must have them in a condition worthy of the place whence I came, and whither I am going."

Now, there are three things in this Scripture which I am anxious to put clearly before you this evening. In

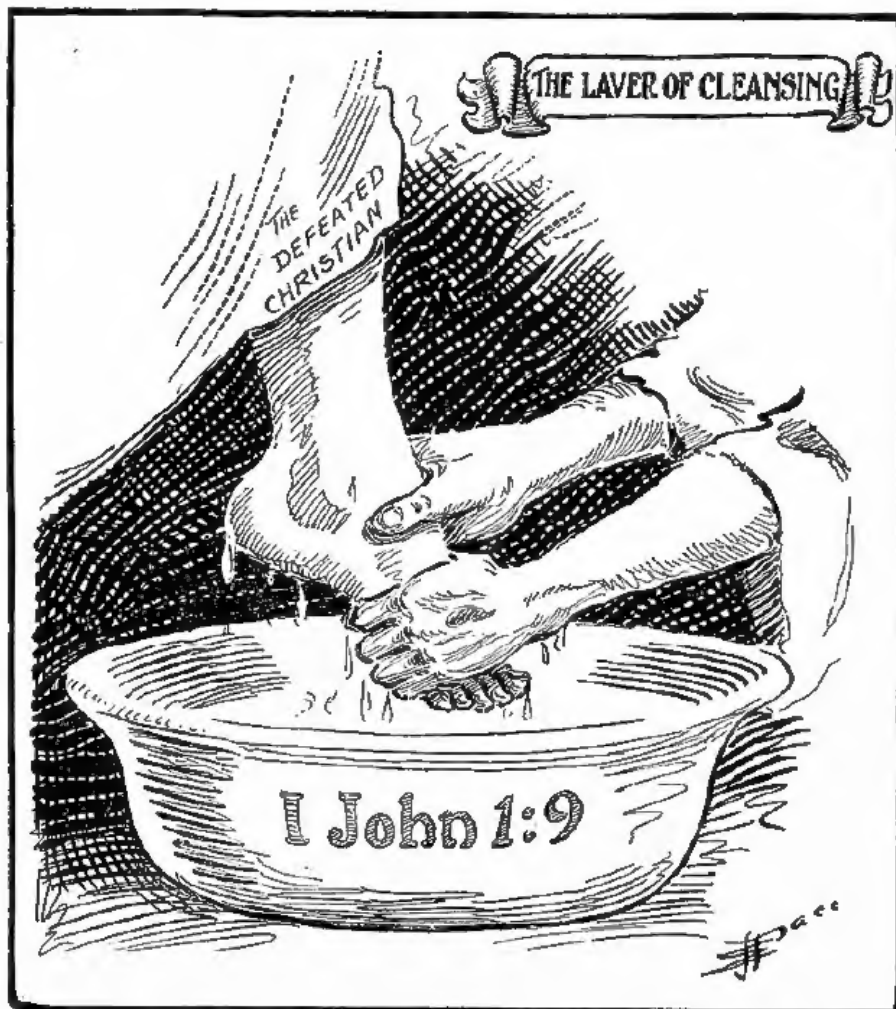
the first place we have the special action of our Lord toward His own in the world; secondly, the spring of that action; and thirdly the measure of the action:—the action, its spring, and its measure.

(1) And first, the action itself. You will bear in mind, beloved in the Lord, that what we have presented here is not "the washing of regeneration." That pertains to the first stage of our Lord's service on our behalf, "His own which are in the world"—all who belong to that highly privileged class (and that is simply all who believe in His name) have passed through that great washing, in virtue of which Christ can pronounce them "clean every whit."

There is not a spot or a stain upon the very feeblest of that blessed number whom He calls "His own."

"He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit; and ye are clean, but not all." He found us clean never a whit, and He has made us "clean every whit."

This is the washing of regeneration, which is never repeated. We have a figure of this in the case of the priests of the Mosaic economy. In the great day of their inauguration they were washed in water. This action was never repeated. But after this, from day to day, in order to fit them for the daily discharge of



their priestly functions, they had to wash their hands and their feet in the brazen laver in the tabernacle, or the brazen sea in the temple. This daily washing is the figure of the action in John 13. The two washings, being distinct, must never be confounded; and being intimately connected, must never be separated. The washing of regeneration is divinely and eternally complete: the washing of sanctification is being divinely and continually carried on. The former is never repeated; the latter is never interrupted. That gives us a part in Christ, of which nothing can rob us; and this gives us a part with Christ, of which anything may deprive us. The one is the basis of our eternal life; the other is the ground of our daily communion.

Beloved brethren, see that you understand the meaning of having your feet washed, moment by moment, by the hands of that blessed One Who is girded as the divine Servant of our present need. It is utterly impossible for anyone to overestimate the importance of this work; but we may at least gather something of its value from our Lord's words to Peter; for Peter, like ourselves, alas! was very far from seizing the full significance of what his Lord was doing.

"Then cometh He to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto Him, Lord, dost Thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto Him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me."

Here is the grand point, "part with Me." The washing of regeneration gives us a part in Christ: the daily washing of sanctification gives us a part with Christ. In order to have full, intelligent, happy communion, we must have a clean conscience, and clean feet. The death of Christ is the necessary basis of everything. He died to make us clean; He lives to keep us clean. We are made as clean as His death can make us; we are kept as clean as His life can keep us.

This is replete with solid comfort for the soul. We are passing through a defiling world, where we are constantly liable to contract evils of one kind or another which though they cannot touch our eternal life, can very seriously affect our communion. It is impossible for us to tread the sanctuary of the divine presence with soiled feet; and hence the deep and unspeakable blessedness of having One ever in the presence of God for us. The provision is divinely perfect. Sin or uncleanness can never be found in the presence of God. If we can make light of either the one or the other, God cannot and will not. We may say it is as impossible that we can walk in the pathway of holiness if our feet are not washed and wiped by that blessed One Who has girded Himself to serve us in this matter perpetually.

All this is divinely simple. There are two links in Christianity: namely, the link of eternal life, which can never be snapped by anything; and the link of personal communion, which can be snapped in a moment by the weight of a feather. Now, it is as our ways are cleansed by the holy action of the Word, through the Holy Ghost, that our communion is maintained in its unbroken integrity.

Now, here, brethren, we have illustrated for us the present ministry of Christ—the action of the Word upon the soul—the application of the basin to the feet—the washing of water by the Word. Will we refuse

the gracious ministry? "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me."

This is very solemn, and it demands our most serious attention. Next in moral importance to having the conscience purged by the blood of Christ stands this cleansing of our ways by the action of the Word, through the power of the Holy Ghost. The former gives us a part in Christ; the latter, a part with Christ. That is never repeated; this must never be interrupted. If we really desire fellowship with Christ, we must allow Him to wash our feet moment by moment. We cannot tread the pure precincts of the sanctuary of God with defiled feet any more than we can enter them with a defiled conscience.

Hence, therefore, dearly beloved in the Lord, let us look well to it that we have our ways continually submitted to the purifying action of the precious Word of God. Let us put away everything which that Word condemns; let us abandon every position and every association and every practice which that Word condemns, so that our holy fellowship with Christ may be maintained in its freshness and integrity.

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